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PP RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHDBU #1848 2830933
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P R 100933Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8774
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1850
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1784
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1842
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1859
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1724
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1817
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1867
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1543
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1556
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1751
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1821
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 1109
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0215

UNCLAS DUSHANBE 001848

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ONE MONTH OUT: TAJIK GOVT SHUTS DOWN WEBSITES AHEAD OF THE ELECTION

REF: Dushanbe 468

11. (U) Tajikistan's internet service providers blocked access to several websites deemed "opposition" sites one month ahead of the November 6 presidential election. Sites include popular news information agencies such as Ferghana.ru and Centralasia.ru. The Ministry of Communications' Agency on Regulation of Communication issued a letter dated September 7 to internet service providers ordering them to block access to websites that "aim to undermine the state's policies in the sphere of information." The Ministry's rationale is that these sites may inflame oppositionists who want to destabilize the government and security situation in Tajikistan.

12. (SBU) Recognizing the ramifications of internet censorship, some internet service providers initially did not respond to the Agency's request and pointed out that it is not the provider's obligation to filter information. They said the Agency on Regulation of Communications is not a censoring body, nor should it engage in investigating websites and providers. One internet service provider's executive director pointed out the Ministry's action undermines President Rahmonov's efforts to attract investments in Tajikistan.

13. (SBU) Communications companies in Tajikistan believe the censorship order is not only to block opposition opinion, but also the latest effort by the Ministry of Communications and the Anti-Monopoly Agency to control more tightly the communications industry. According to Embassy sources, these two government departments aim to control communication industry tariffs. The Ministry of Communications still has not given up the idea of establishing a single gateway for Tajikistan, forcing all telecommunications and internet service providers to lay out their cables through that gateway in order to gain access to major international telecommunications hubs (reftel). A single gateway would essentially create a monopoly to enable the

Ministry to monitor information content, and collect tariffs without competition. The Ministry of Communications continues to try to push approval for a single gateway through parliament, but thus far has not been successful, due to unusually vocal opposition from telecom and internet operators.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: It is unclear who is behind this latest effort to shut down the opposition and control internet media. Rahmonov knows he will win the election and censorship is hardly necessary at this point because no true opposition candidates are running. Tajikistan has not seen a strong movement on the internet to foment opposition or undermine the government, as only three percent of the population has access to the internet.

This censorship signals that the Tajik government is confident of its strength and may move to tighten the reins on media freedom even after the election. END COMMENT.

HUSHEK